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THUNDER CLOUD
Etched by Frederick C. Stahr
Second Prize (Baldwin) 1890, National Academy of Design

DUOGRAPH PLATES MADE BY BARNES-CROSBY CO.



BRUSH AND PENCIL

VOL. X

JUNE, 1902

No. 3

FRITHJOF SMITH-HALD, NORWEGIAN LAND- SCAPE-PAINTER

Some years ago the late Professor H. H. Boyesen, in an essay, quoted a characteristic passage from Henry James's "Transatlantic Sketches," relative to the art of northern Europe, and construed the trenchant criticism contained in the words as a supreme compliment.

Said Henry James: "The early German painters do not seem to have suspected that such a thing as beauty existed; the painter's mission in their eyes is simply to appropriate, ready made, the infinite variations of grotesqueness which they regard as the necessary environment and condition of the human lot."

Said Professor

Boyesen, in reply: "I regard this as a tribute to the honesty of the German painters rather than a reflection on their sense of beauty. It would have been easy for Albrecht Dürer, for instance, who visited Italy twice and was intoxicated with the splendor of the Italian Renaissance, to subordinate his own vision of life to that of Mantegna and Bellini, and imitate the classical grace and the blooming color of their canvases. If he or Holbein had succumbed to such temptation (which a less sturdy genius would have been sure to do), there would in all probability have been no such thing as a German national art, but merely an imported Italian art applied to German conditions. To me the pathetic Teutonic ugliness of Lucas Cranach's 'Eve' was a happier augury for the future of German art than the charming distinction of Tintoretto, the joyous nobility and



WINTER'S COMING, NORWAY
By Frithjof Smith-Hald



INQUIETUDE

By Frithjof Smith-Hald

ease of Titian, or the rich academic beauty of Raphael would have been, as long as they were not indigenous, but would have had to be borrowed."

This little tilt of words was apropos of the honesty, faithfulness, and loyalty of the Northmen to their environment, and Professor Boyesen voiced a principle which must ever be taken into consideration by any one who would understand and appreciate a nation's art.

As a matter of fact, Norway can scarcely be said to have a distinctive national art, since its painters, influenced by Tidemand and Gude, who were educated at Düsseldorf, received their art impulse from Germany. Nowegian art, therefore, from its earliest beginnings, has in a general sense been German art cast on the new lines of Norwegian environment. Yet these sturdy sons of the North—among whom is Frithjof Smith-Hald, the subject of this article—have been men too patriotic in their sentiments, too loyal to the home of their fathers, too much imbued with the spirit of Norse independence, to be mere copyists, and consequently, while they openly avow their debt to Germany, as Germany acknowledges receiving its art impulse from Italy, they have sought to develop, and in fair measure have succeeded in developing, an art as thoroughly characteristic of northern latitudes as the art of the south is characteristic of Latin life.

Of this strong, virile art of the North comparatively little is known in America, and it is only of late years that the southern nations of Europe have awakened to the fact that work is being done in the

Scandinavian peninsula of sufficient merit to command their respect and admiration. The last winter exhibition of the Secession in Vienna was little less than a revelation as regards the art of the northern empires. The beauties of northern literature, especially of the literature of Viking days, with its motley mixture of savage and heroic qualities, have long been prized, and the display of northern art in Vienna showed that it, like the northern literature, was the product of a highly developed people, that it was founded upon racial instincts and traditions, and that it was true to the environment in which it had been developed.

In a word, the art of Norway represents a civilization of its own, depicts a peculiar landscape of its own, and stands in sharp contrast with the art of southern latitudes. Notwithstanding the German influence that has given direction to their efforts, these northern painters depict on their canvases a primordial home and a primordial landscape, and their work comes to us, as a close student has pointed out, like instinctive manifestations of the life of a primitive art impulse. They get direct what the artists of the South have to reach by the circuitous route of culture and tradition, and hence they offer us an immediate in place of a mediate art, an original art in place of one that is derived.

We must not forget, moreover, that this art of the North has been developed under conditions little calculated to stimulate and foster a



THE SHOWER
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

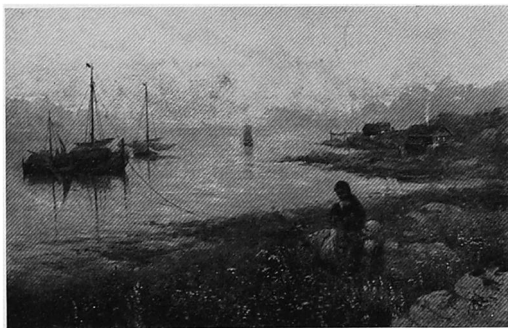


WANE OF DAY, NORWAY
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

generous growth. Professor Boyesen, himself a Norwegian, and prone from national pride to be an apologist for things Norwegian, lamented that a certain somberness of tone and narrowness of vision are the inevitable conditions of life in a small and poor country where there is but little wealth

and no leisure class, and where the mere struggle for existence absorbs so large a share of man's thoughts and interests. He admitted that the spectacle of Norwegian life itself suffered from a depressing scantiness, contractedness, and poverty of form and color, and that apart from the scenery, which in northern and northwestern Norway is sublime, there was nothing to feed the pictorial fancy, nothing to kindle the soul with the glow and thrill of joyous observation. He regretted that the pictorial genius of his country had as a rule been cramped and often crippled by lack of early opportunity, and that, despite the kindly interest and assistance of the government, the painters of Norway who had achieved distinction and independence owed their success to the recognition they had received, and the patronage that had been accorded them away from home.

In this regard Smith-Hald is no exception. His work has won for him international reputation and consequently international support. Happily doubtless for his development, his taste inclined him to landscape and seascape. He has indeed made some pictures on the coast of England, but for the most part he has devoted himself to interpreting and re-



EVENING, PEACE
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

cording the fjords, mountains, and glorious atmospheric phenomena of his native country. The novelty of the scenes depicted, coupled with his own ability as a draftsman and a colorist, has centered on him the admiration of the art-loving public.

To appreciate the art of Smith-Hald one must know something of the country from which he drew his early inspirations, and to which, notwithstanding his changes of residence—he lived and worked in Paris twelve years—he has ever remained loyal. That country is



WAITING
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

austere, and yet it has certain beauties and a certain grandeur rarely if ever seen in southern climes. In a sense the very land savors of the stern heroic spirit of Viking days. It is the land of the Midnight Sun. Its atmosphere is distinctive, and crag and mere glint under a play of color unknown elsewhere.

The life of the people has its joy and pathos, as elsewhere, and its poetry is the poetry of a simple life, worthy of transcription to canvas. But after all, this Northland offers more inspiration to the landscapist and seascapist than to *genre* painters and to the limners of types. Smith-Hald to-day is one of the best known of the Norwegian painters outside of his own country, and the secret of this doubtless is, that he recognized the beauties of the northern mountains and seas and made these beauties his art specialty.

Inherent in every painting worthy of the name is the poetry that inspired it, and a little pen-picture of the Northland by Marie Corelli

may give some hint of the richness and grandeur of the landscape which Smith-Hald has for years so industriously and sympathetically painted, and by which he is known to the art lovers of two continents. Says she, in "Thelma"—and her words may be taken as a literal description of many of Smith-Hald's choicest works:

"Midnight—without darkness, without stars! Midnight—and the unwearied sun stood, yet visible, in the heavens, like a victorious king, throned on a dais of royal purple bordered with gold. The sky above him—his canopy—gleamed with a cold yet lustrous blue, while across it slowly flitted a few wandering clouds of palest amber deeping as

they sailed along to a tawny orange. A broad stream of light, falling, as it were, from the center of the magnificent orb, shot lengthwise across the Alten Fjord, turning its waters to a mass of quivering and shifting color that alternated from bronze to copper—from copper to silver and azure.



FISHERMAN'S HOME, NORWAY
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

"The surrounding hills glowed with a warm deep violet tint, flecked here and there with touches of bright red, as though fairies were lighting tiny bonfires on their summits. Away in the distance a huge mass of rock stood out to view, its rugged lines transfigured into ethereal loveliness by a misty veil of tender rose pink—a hue curiously suggestive of some other and smaller sun that might have just set. Absolute silence prevailed. Not even the cry of a sea-mew or kittiwake broke the almost deathlike stillness—no breath of wind stirred a ripple on the glassy water.

"The whole scene might well have been the fantastic dream of some imaginative painter, whose ambition soared beyond the limits of human skill. Yet it was only one of those million wonderful effects of sky and sea which are common in Norway, especially on the Alten Fjord, where, though beyond the Arctic Circle, the climate in summer is that of another Italy, and the landscape a living poem, fairer than the visions of Endymion."

This is not a fanciful word poem: it is a statement of fact. Marie Corelli but painted in words what Smith-Hald has painted so often in colors, but, however, with this difference, she described a scene with the enthusiasm which is born of a novelty that pleases and fascinates,



TWILIGHT, NORWAY
By Fritbjof Smith-Hald



and he describes similar scenes with the interpretative sense inherent in him as a refined and sensitive poet and a native of the land.

These words by Marie Corelli have been quoted at length because, being general and faithful, they in a sense make unnecessary any detailed description of individual pictures, which of necessity must be halting and unsatisfactory. The pictures herewith reproduced will give a fair idea of Smith-Hald's choice of subjects, and the reader has but to think into the black and white prints something of the solemn-



SUNSET IN THE FAR NORTH
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

nity and grandeur, something of the spirit and color, something of the evanescent effects, something of the witcheries of earth and sky described in the extract, to have an appreciative sense of Smith-Hald's characteristic work.

To this strangely beautiful land, the marvel of all visitors from other climes, Smith-Hald has ever been faithful. Note the titles of some of his pictures, which may be taken as an index of all the rest: "Return of Fishermen, Norway," "Morning Walk, Norway," "Steamboat Wharf, Norway," "Winter Evening in Norway," "Winter Morning on the Coast of Norway," "Moonrise, Return from Mass, Norway," "Morning at Christiana Fjord," "Sunset Near Frondhjem, Calm in Fjord," "Bandaksvandet Lake, Norway."

This string of titles is not without its significance. It is eloquent of the devotion of the painter to his country, and hence a tribute to him.

Barring the few pictures descriptive of scenes in Cornwall on the coast of England, his themes are Norwegian. Before, like many another painter, he was impelled to seek the art influence of the Parisian capital, he had lived the life of the mountains and the fjords till it claimed him as its own and precluded the warping of his genius by the influence of the schools. The only effect of Parisian residence on Smith-Hald has been a refinement of his art, not a change of



LEVER DE LUNE
By Frithjof Smith-Hald

character or loss of individuality. It has been one of the complaints in America that the students who go to Paris come back Parisian, and that as a consequence American art is little more than French art with American trimmings. In the case of Smith-Hald Norway has no such complaint. He is first and pre-eminently Norwegian in spirit and in theme.

There are certain features in Smith-Hald's canvases that are little less than omnipresent—a picturesque mountain slope, the craggy side of a fjord, a sameness of rich coloring in the sky, and above all, the midnight sun that never sets. These, however, are not witnesses of paucity of ideas or narrowness of interests and abilities: they are characteristics forced upon him by fidelity to the landscape he portrays. His is the country of mountains and fjords, of peculiar atmos-

pheric effects, of the midnight sun; and to eliminate any of these features from his canvases would be to paint, not Norwegian landscapes and seascapes, but studio compositions.

The fact that he has uniformly painted a strange reality has made him strong, and, as hinted above, the strangeness and at the same time the simple frankness of that reality may perhaps be counted as one of the elements of his popularity. The individual note, moreover, is ever present in his canvases. A pupil of Gude, subjected for twelve years to Parisian influences, and later to the art influences at Antwerp, where he was made member of honor of the Royal Society of Art, he has ever remained Smith-Hald, the Norwegian, and his work is as easily distinguishable as that of the greatest modern masters who have developed for themselves a distinctive style and pre-empted for themselves a special mode of treatment.

Smith-Hald's genius has been widely recognized, and his supremacy among landscape-painters of the North has been generally admitted. He has won many medals and decorations, and at the universal exhibition in New Orleans he was awarded a certificate for the best painting displayed. He is represented in the museum of the Luxembourg, in the museums of Lille, Reims, Bordeaux, Rouen, Boulogne, The Hague, Cologne, and many another of the leading art institutions in Europe and America. His work is of that peculiar character, both in composition and coloring, that lends itself readily to reproductive processes, and a number of his best paintings have been issued in gravures, photogravures, and color prints. Most of the pictures herewith produced are from protographs of recent work.

Zola has defined art as "nature seen through the medium of temperament." If this definition be true, then Smith-Hald's pictures are the best possible tribute to Smith-Hald the man. They are refined, poetic, direct, and natural. Without any suggestion of trickery or striving for effect, they are sympathetic bits of interpretation of a world unfamiliar to many if not most of his admirers; and for his work in thus presenting beautiful but unidealized transcripts of her scenery to the world Norway owes him a debt of thanks.

FREDERICK W. MORTON.

